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## NEW BOOKS REVIEWED.

BY THOMAS WALSH, CHARLES JOHNSTON AND CARL SNYDER.

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"THE GREATER ENGLISH POETS OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY."\*

THE wealth of poetical illustration to his new volume, "The Greater Poets of the Nineteenth Century," as well as Dr. William Morton Payne's scholarship and enthusiasm for the muse, have given rise in some critic quarters to a misapprehension of the purport of his work. From the start, however, he disclaims any intention to discuss the strictly literary achievement of the twelve English poets, from Keats to Swinburne, to whom he ascribes pre-eminence; but proposes to devote himself to tracing their relation to the worlds of thought and action and their outlook upon the life of their century.

This disclaimer will hardly soothe the critical feathers that have been ruffled; for Dr. Payne's treatment of the poets is after a fashion that is "popular rather than scholarly," a sociological procedure in which the poets figure merely as the human documents and exhibits, and their poetry as a matter of secondary importance.

While one remembers that poetry has many aspects, and whatever may add to its value with the masses should meet with encouragement at the hands of all true believers, it remains to be questioned whether any serious end—poetical or scientific—is served by this kind of "criticism of life" which,—while noting the inadequacy of the phrase as a definition of poetry,—Dr. Payne adopts as the directing principle of his volume.

How little benefit to poetry can be derived from scientific criticism, which as a prerequisite confines itself to cool and calculated processes and eschews emotion of any kind, must be

\* "The Greater English Poets of the Nineteenth Century." By William Morton Payne, LL.D. New York: Henry Holt & Company. 1907.

clear at a glance. That science, on the other hand, can hope for valuable results from the application of sociological methods to subject-matter, such as modern poetry, seems an opinion that leaves out of account the uncertainty of the æsthetic equation in every artist and work of art. What literary confusion and evil will not result from a criticism that will grade the poets in importance according as they supply materials for history or philosophic theories? It is usually the lesser poet who most clearly expresses his environment, and when we consider the continual reiterations of opinion, the constantly growing intricacy of modern society, we have no little reason to question as inconclusive the data which the scientists persist in demanding from poetry.

"The Greater English Poets of the Nineteenth Century" is in a way supplementary to the voluminous work on "Main Currents in Nineteenth Century Literature" by the Danish critic Dr. Georg Brandes, the weakest part of whose series is perhaps that devoted to the English naturalist movement. In both method and philosophy the works of Dr. Payne and Dr. Brandes present interesting similarities, and, while it may be said that the American critic brings to his subject a fuller comprehension, nevertheless he may not lay claim to the wealth of data and analogy with which Dr. Brandes wins the popular ear.

Moreover, Dr. Payne has not been always wary of the radical tendencies in the Danish *littérateur* against which he himself feels called upon to warn his readers. He does not, of course, declare open warfare on conservative positions, such as characterize the later volumes of "Main Currents in Nineteenth Century Literature," but he indirectly forms the mind of his readers to regard the poets of the nineteenth century as being great in such measure as they conform with the movements and prognostications of to-day—a period confessedly anarchic in the worlds of art and thought. Tested on such a shifting scale, the poet Coleridge, the intellectual, who dealt with life in the terms of eternity, becomes a pathetic figure out of harmony with the times and *schema* of radical philosophy; Wordsworth, with his reverence for what was established and his fears lest excesses in thought and action might not lead to the hoped-for betterment of society, is also put aside unsympathetically; Tennyson, with his ceaseless queries as to a moral order in the universe and the claims of man to immortality, seems, as it were, touched with

the shadow of the retrograde and receives what his admirers will feel to be rather cold consideration.

But, on the other hand, Shelley, that winged messenger of the freedom of the spirit, supplies the very gospel of this lyric philosophy; Byron, the voice of revolution, the philosopher, rather than the poet, of "Don Juan"; Landor, that Walt Whitman of the Parthenon; Browning, whose faith, says Professor Santayana, as quoted by Dr. Payne, "is invincible because it is unseizable—as safe from refutation as it is from embodiment"; Matthew Arnold, loath to admit that his philosophy had anything in common with "interdependent, subordinate and coherent principles"; William Morris, whose radicalism may explain his inclusion among these greater poets; Swinburne boldly assailing the old orders of creed and code which the others had been merely content to deny;—these are Dr. Payne's true "intermediaries between nature and the public"; through these are traced the traditions of the radical school and the up-to-date dogmas of literary evolution.

Let us hope, after all, that however it may be with philosophy, we may still regard poetry as the rhythmic pease-porridge which some will have hot and others cold. Long may our poets prove to be the delight and solace of gentle souls as well as the despair and confusion of the utilitarian pragmatist!

It is to be hoped also that Dr. Payne, now he has given us under the somewhat misleading title of "The Greater English Poets of the Nineteenth Century," so readable an epitome of the philosophies of the past hundred years, he will gratify his admirers with that volume upon the English poets as poets which he would seem eminently fitted to provide.

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THOMAS WALSH.

#### A HISTORY OF AMERICAN PHILOSOPHY.\*

ONE begins this book with interest and continues it with growing enthusiasm, gradually led to the conclusion that it is one of the most valuable works published here in recent years, and one which renders the highest service to the nation. This is a book which makes us wish we had something here like the French Academy, that so good a book might be stamped with the seal of national approval.

\* "American Philosophy, the Early Schools." By I. Woodbridge Riley, Ph.D. New York: Dodd, Mead & Co.